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“Get Ready for Fall Gardening”

Don't wait for cool weather before getting ready for fall gardening. There are many things that can be done during late August and September that will pay off early next season.

There is still time for one last planting of the warm season vegetables. August plantings of bush, pole and lima beans, cucumbers, southern peas, peppers, squash and tomatoes usually have time to bear before cool weather arrives.

Several of the cool season, or winter vegetables, can be seeded or transplanted in August or September. In August plant broccoli, cauliflower, collards, bunching onions and turnips. In September add beets, brussels sprouts, cabbage, carrots, endive, escarole, kale, kohlrabi, leek, lettuce, mustard, bulbing onions, parsley and radish. Many local gardeners believe that the cool season vegetables are easier to grow, experiencing fewer pest problems.

Prepare to dig up any crowded, clumping type perennials during September. Divide the clumps and replant them immediately. Daylilies, liriope and mondo grass are examples of these kinds of plants. They respond well to being moved at this time of year. Our mild soil temperatures allow for root growth and recovery during the winter.

September is also the month to dig and separate amaryllis bulbs, if necessary. Healthy, mature amaryllis plants often form new bulbs surrounding the original and these can be removed to increase plantings. Replant the bulbs once they have been separated, and remember not to plant too deeply. The tip of each amaryllis bulb should be even with the top of the ground when the job is done.

Question of the Week: What are the pros and cons of removing grass trimmings versus mulching?

Answer: In most cases it is better to recycle lawn clippings. If the grass is not allowed

to grow excessively high between mowings, there is no negative effect. In fact, you will probably see an improvement in the lawn because these tender clippings are decomposed quickly, returning minerals and organic matter to the soil.

The rule of thumb is to remove no more than one-third of the grass height when mowing. For example, if you are mowing centipede at a 2 inch height, mow before it grows to more than 3 inches.

The use of a mulching type mower is recommended. The setup depends upon your specific mower. With some, the change from bagging to mulching is as simple as taking off the bag and closing the discharge chute. With other mowers, conversion might require changing to a different kind of blade and making other modifications. Consult your owner's manual and dealer concerning any specifics.

A special grass clipping recycling mower, though highly recommended, is not absolutely necessary. Allowing the mower to discharge clippings from the side chute is acceptable if other good basic mowing principles are followed. These include the use of a sharp mower blade; the right cutting height for your kind of grass and always mowing when the leaves and stems are dry.

I know of only a few cases where bagging should be considered. First, it's a good way to remove excess leaves from the lawn. When the lawn is allowed to grow too tall between mowings the clippings become tough and slow to decompose and should be bagged.

There is one lawn disease that can be spread by clippings. If *Pythium* fungus is positively identified as infecting the grass, then it is recommended that a bagger be used on the mower until the disease is under control.